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SENSITIVE  
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STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CRS  
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG  
NSC FOR JWOOD  
OSD FOR SHIVERS  
CG CJTF-82, POLAD, JICCENT

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SUBJECT: "HYBRID" VOTER REGISTRATION BEGINS OCTOBER 6

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Afghanistan's Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) will pursue a hybrid voter registration. Voters who have registration cards from 2004/5 may use these cards at the polls. New voters and voters who lost their card, must register for a new, enhanced voter card. The IEC's belated decision frees the IROA, the UN elections team, and donors to move ahead smartly to address technical and security issues. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The IEC briefed its much-delayed and much-debated decision on voter registration to key partner country ambassadors on July 5, and to the international community's elections stakeholders group on July 6, with positive reactions. Registration's goal, according to the IEC's briefs, is to capture all eligible voters who currently reside in Afghanistan. (Note: This would seem to exclude from the polls the estimated one million voting-age Afghans among the two million refugees resident in Pakistan and an unknown number of potential voters among the one million refugees and migrants in Iran, as well as politically-engaged diaspora Afghans living in the U.S. and Europe.) Previously-issued cards will remain valid, and voters who did not register previously, who have lost their voter card, or who will reach 18 before the cutoff for the 2009 elections, will be able to register nationwide. Mobile registration teams will serve Kuchi nomad voters. Newly-registered voters will be assigned to a polling place, laying solid ground for the 2010 parliamentary electoral rolls.

¶3. (SBU) The voter registration strategy has several provisions against possible fraud. The new voter cards will have two thumbprints and a photo. These biometrics will be part of the registry database and will be used to weed out attempts to register, or to vote, more than once. The IEC's Deputy Chief Zekria Barakzai displayed an example of the finalized new voter registration form to the elections stakeholders group, with three key security features: a bar-coded serial number, rainbow-colored printing, and intentional printing errors. The IEC noted that voters who have a card and seek to register for a new card will be required to submit their previous card for destruction. Comparison of voter names between old and new registries and of duplicate names will be possible, according to Barakzai, although the IEC and the UN's technical advisors agree it is too soon to say whether these additional steps will prove a useful enhancement to the indelible ink in forestalling efforts to vote multiple times.

14. (SBU) The hybrid strategy eases slightly the burden on the IEC,s still-nascent administrative capacity. With an estimate of a maximum of 8 million potential registrants out of the approximately 16 million eligible voters, the hybrid process will use fewer registration sites and fewer field staff than earlier plans. Registration will begin October 6 and will follow through four phases that address the travel limitations of the winter weather. The central highlands, excepting Kabul, will register first, before the snows, and the south ) Nimroz, Helmand, Uruzgan, and Kandahar -- will complete the cycle when registration concludes there in February 2009. The UN elections team expects its procurement specialists in Kabul by July 10, to help it accelerate its support to the IEC. Public outreach to citizens on the voter registration process is an urgent priority, IEC Chief Dr. Najafi says. UNDP/ELECT chief Margee Cook appealed to the elections stakeholders group for rapid delivery of donor funds.

15. (SBU) With a final concept of operations in place, the IEC is ready to re-engage the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defense on security for voter registration. IEC President Dr. Lodin (protect) said July 6 that security is now his chief concern. UNDP/ELECT notes that the principal constraint on security operations for the 2004 and 2005 electoral process was helicopter lift capacity for IROA forces. The hybrid strategy's phased approach remains essentially the same as some earlier proposals, which should facilitate security planning for October -- even as the fighting season is underway now.

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